

FIGO statement on Caesarean Section - 23/01/2007

FIGO supports the view that childbearing, for the great majority of women throughout the world, is a normal, physiological process influenced by culture, traditions, religion and psychosocial factors. FIGO further asserts that childbearing is a family event that requires as a starting point a health-oriented rather than a disease-oriented model of care from providers.

The ability to offer delivery by Caesarean section is essential for safe maternity care. In poor countries there remains a substantial burden of maternal and fetal death due to a lack of access to safe Caesarean delivery. Internationally, recommendations on maternal and fetal indications for Caesarean delivery continue to evolve in the light of research findings. However, some countries have experienced increasing recourse to Caesarean delivery for non-medical indications. FIGO considers surgical intervention without a medical rationale to fall outside the bounds of best professional practice. Caesarean delivery should be undertaken only when indicated to enhance the well-being of mothers and babies and improve outcomes.

FIGO respects women as active participants in decisions that affect their health care. Making informed decisions about the use or non-use of interventions such as Caesarean section requires that women have up-to-date, complete and understandable information on the risks and benefits of proposed interventions.

FIGO calls upon individual obstetricians to offer women evidence based delivery care within a framework of professional practice. FIGO exhorts those responsible for public and private maternity service provision to facilitate the best standards of professional practice by enabling staff participation in continuing medical education, review processes such as clinical audit, and outcomes research. Health systems need fully to address the infrastructure requirements for safe operative delivery including anaesthesia, prevention of hospital acquired infection and safe blood transfusion.

All professionals and health policy makers share responsibility for comprehensive maternity service provision that enables women to access appropriate care in a timely manner. Women should not be denied access to Caesarean delivery when needed for want of funds or infrastructure; neither should they be placed under pressure to have a Caesarean birth because of a lack of professional care to support a normal labour and delivery.

Approved on 23 January 2007 by the FIGO Executive Board